

Allentown Homeless Commission

10-14-20 10-11:30am via Microsoft Teams call

Attendance: Efrain Agosto, Ellen Denizard, Ce-Ce Gerlach, Glenn Granitz, Eric Gratz, Mike Hamlin, Jerald Harnett, Carolyn Hoffman, Tom Harrington, Marie Joseph, Tim Joyce, Vicky Kistler, Jennifer Miklus, Larry Pickens, Tommy Rodriguez, Hope Sabbaugh, Charlene Smalls, Ben Stephens, Michelle Wagner, Heidi Westerman, Allen Zelno

- I. Tom Harrington: Welcome & Introductions, Anna Lightner unable to attend today.

- II. Update on Proposed Officers & Committee Assignments
 - a. Tom Harrington: Officers confirmed:
 - i. Chair - Tom Harrington
 - ii. 1st Vice Chair - Robert Nicolella
 - iii. 2nd Vice Chair - Charlene Smalls
 - iv. Secretary - Larry Pickens
 - b. Committee Chairs confirmed
 - i. Strategic Planning - Ellen Denizard, Carolyn Hoffman
 - ii. Emergency Shelters & Street Outreach - Michelle Wagner
 - iii. Tent Encampments - Jennifer Miklus
 - iv. Inter-Governmental Committee - Larry Pickens, Carolyn Hoffman volunteers to co chair
 - v. Permanent Supportive Housing & RRH - Ben Stephens volunteers to chair
 - vi. Funding & Resources Committee - Hope Sabbaugh volunteers to chair
 - vii. Landlord Engagement - Rob Nicollella states Deanne Best and Alison Moretz volunteer to co-chair
 - viii. Youth Homelessness & Allentown School District - Charlene Smalls volunteers to chair
 - c. Tom Harrington: committee priorities to be developed and drafted by Chairs. Chairs will also need to participate on strategic planning subcommittee. Need to confirm of City Dept Heads are considered actually commission members, will find out from Mayor.

- III. Update on Strategic Planning Process
 - a. Ellen Denizard: Subcommittees need to develop priorities and action steps. These will go into full strategic plan. First meeting is 3pm 10/15 online. Following meetings will be every other Thursday until approximately January. Rough draft of strategic plan to be ready by January AHC full meeting, Final plan to be presented to City Council in March 2021.

- IV. Update on Tent Encampment Eviction Plan
 - a. Jennifer Miklus: Approximately 6-8 residents still in Parkettes encampment. Will be getting exact count of how many residents are unsheltered homeless. Seeking a permanent solution that involves residents not being outdoors. Seeking a building or land from the city that folks could stay in/on. Subcommittee will create a proposal based

on evidence and practice from other groups around country. Exploring theme of homelessness as public health crisis

- i. Heidi Westerman: City has posted signs in Parkettes encampment with resources. Parkettes residents can work with non-profits to access services. No parcel from city is currently available for residents to relocate to. City will hear proposals for more permanent solutions.
- ii. Hope Sabbaugh: Funding Subcommittee is seeking grants etc to assist with solutions. Can city help with planning and identifying funds?
- iii. Tom Harrington: Can Ripple expand housing services if funding was identified?
 1. Charlene Smalls: Yes, will come up with an estimate of costs and timeframe.
- iv. Heidi Westerman: will share list of vacant buildings and properties in city.
- v. Ellen Denizard: Explore using ASD vacant schools.
- vi. Charlene Smalls: City needs year round shelter, and homeless bill of rights, services for addiction and MH services. May need another subcommittee to address addiction and MH.
- vii. Rob Nicolella: Need to separate current priorities and long range planning.
- viii. Vicki Kistler: A year round shelter may not be practical. May have challenges obtaining funding, challenges with certain residents accepting shelter. Regardless, will not be practical in a time frame for Parkettes encampment residents. This work can be done in subcommittees, both urgent priorities, and long term planning.
- ix. Heidi Westerman: Weekly resource hub wednesdays at Ripple. Workers from non-profits and Lehigh County. Typically, Parkettes residents have not been using this hub.
- x. Tom Harrington: What would happen if Parkettes residents won't leave?
- xi. Heidi Westerman: Ann Saurman has been working with residents to ensure area is cleaned out by then, but if it comes to it, law enforcement would be involved
- xii. Jennifer Miklus: OATH is working to get all Parkettes residents relocated.

V. Discussion on Homeless Bill of Rights

- a. Rob Nicolella: Should come from a subcommittee, be part of strategic plan.
- b. Ellen Denizard: Could present with strategic plan in March.
- c. Charlene Smalls: The need for bill of rights is more urgent, can be amended to meet local needs.
- d. Mike Hanlon: public comments have come in and will be presented to City Council on 10/15. Common theme involves public wanting to see long term solutions for homelessness, but are concerned about certain specifics in bill of rights will leads to problems at certain businesses or neighborhoods
- e. Heidi Westerman: City has existing ordinances that would be contradictory to portions of bill of rights, ie sleeping in public spaces
- f. Carolyn Hoffman: Can city provide list of contradictory ordinances? Business owners concerned about bill of rights should help with homelessness solutions.

- g. Rob Nicollela: National Coalition for Homeless website has info on homelessness local legislation across country.
- h. Ce-Ce Gerlach: Introduced bill of rights in response to unsheltered residents reporting discrimination. State Rep Schlossberg proposed a bill of rights years ago in PA House which died in committee. Support subcommittees working on curtailing bill of rights to Allentown's needs. Would like all amendments and recommendations to come from AHC, not politicians.
- i. Hope Sabbaugh: Bill of rights should address access to voting, access to ID documents

VI. Update from City Department Heads/Reps

- a. Vicky Kistler (Health Bureau): Thrilled about bill of rights being introduced in City Council, hopes to see actions steps behind it. Health Bureau supports bill of rights including specifics on D&A interventions/overdose prevention.
- b. Heidi Westerman (Community and Economic Development): Excited about progress. City wants rights and protections for homeless residents.
- c. Glenn Granitz (APD): Looking forward to see what commission wants to accomplish. When police intervene with homeless residents, it is typically related to a report from a citizen or business.
- d. Eric Gratz (Emergency Medical Services): Lots of good ideas. Concerns about colder months approaching, combined with covid and Parkettes encampment eviction. EMS collaborating with LVHN, Allentown Health Bureau to coordinate flu shots.
- e. Efrain Agosto (Fire Department): Concerns about bill of rights allowing sleeping in public buildings because of zoning and safety hazards.
- f. Ce-Ce Gerlach (City Council): Appreciates AHC coming together on bill of rights, happy to defer to AHC for recommendations. Will be reaching out to businesses who have expressed concerns to ask for assistance with solutions.

VII. Coordinating services and meetings of provider and community groups

- a. Tim Joyce: AHC and subcommittees should consider its role of existing homeless intervention groups to prevent duplication of work, siloed operations. Should consider condensing some projects. Also need to coordinate community and faith based groups which service unsheltered and other residents in need.

VIII. Next meeting

- a. Tom Harrington: 11/11 10am

Meeting ended at 11:26am.